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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

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Friday, July 1, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "HIGH POINTS OF VEGETABLE COOKERY." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Today I'm bringing you some suggestions for cooking fresh vegetables. I know I don't need to explain "why". For now the grocery stores are showing a wider assortment of garden stuff than ever. Roadside vegetable markets are almost overflowing into the highways. And if you have a garden of your own, probably that is producing peas and beans faster than your family can eat them.

When I was young I used to think the garden was a sort of summer amusement park. Picking beans and peas was a little monotonous. But pulling radishes was an interesting game -- trying to figure out from the tops how big the radishes underground would be. And it took some clever detective work to find the big cucumbers that always hid away under yards and yards of vine.

Of course there wasn't anything so amusing about bugging potato vines. But it was quite profitable -- at 5 cents for every hundred of the little brown striped bugs you caught. And when things got dull you could always use onion stems as pipes for blowing bubbles. Or make a doll from an ear of the sweet corn that grew along the fence. The tawny corn silk made most satisfactory hair.

But that's enough of garden reminiscences. I expect you're more interested in some practical suggestions for cooking vegetables. For no matter how attractive the vegetables look in the garden they need proper cooking to put them across at mealtime.

Cooking vegetables is a two-way proposition. First, there's the food value angle. That is, vegetables are valuable sources of certain vitamins and minerals. So one of the cooking problems is to save as much as possible of this food value.

And the second cooking problem is making the vegetable appetite appealing -- serving it up so that each member of the family will want to eat a good sized portion -- maybe even a second helping. For of course there's not much point to saving the vitamins and minerals in a vegetable if no one eats it.

Nutritionists have boiled down the various points in saving food value in vegetables into one general, simple rule. It is this -- "Cook vegetables in as short a time as possible -- and use as little water as you can."

Here are the two main reasons behind that rule. One is that when you heat vegetables in the presence of air some of the vitamins are destroyed. So for their benefit -- keep the cooking time down. Other vitamins and some mineral salts dissolve in the cooking water. So for their sake, it's a good idea to use as little water as you possibly can to cook vegetables.

There is no such a convenient general rule for making vegetables appealing to the appetite. For vegetable attractiveness is many-sided. It is partly how a vegetable looks -- partly how it smells -- and how it tastes. And each of these presents its own special problems.

Take color, for instance. That's one of the most attractive things about a vegetable. We want our asparagus to be a nice green -- our beets red -- our cauliflower a clean white. If any one of them is a bit "off" in color it just doesn't look so tempting.

To keep green vegetables green -- cook them in as short a time as possible -- and leave the lid off the pan during cooking. The green pigment changes in color when it is overcooked and especially when acid is present in the cooking water. And there will be acid present in the cooking water if you leave the lid on the pan. For there are certain acids in the vegetable itself that go off into the air with the steam. In a closed container they condense back into the cooking water.

But to keep red vegetables red -- and white vegetables white -- do just the opposite as far as the acid is concerned. That is, leave the lid on the pan and add a little dilute acid if you want to. For red vegetables keep red and white ones stay white in water that is slightly acid.

Probably the one thing that's most important of all in making a vegetable "good to eat" is its flavor. And in flavor, just as in color, vegetables vary a lot. Some are strong -- some medium -- some mild. So you have to cook each one accordingly -- especially the ones that tend to be strong or those that are mild.

For instance, cabbage is a regular Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde as far as flavor is concerned. Cook it in the right way -- in an open kettle with water to cover, until it is just done. Then you have a dish of cabbage that's mild in flavor, crisp in texture, and altogether delicious. But overcook it -- in a closed kettle. Well, I can't describe the taste or the smell of the brownish unappetizing result.

Mild-flavored vegetables such as new peas won't be so positively unpleasant if you overcook them. Instead, they'll be insipid and flavorless. But cook them in just a minimum of lightly salted water in an open kettle until they are just done and you have something entirely different. You bring out their delicate, sweet flavor and their lovely cool color.

As to the texture of vegetables -- here the "don't overcook" rule holds good again. Far too many vegetables go to the table in a soft and flabby state because they are cooked too long.

I haven't time for any more vegetable talk today, but let me hit some of the high points of vegetable cookery again. First -- "Cook vegetables as short a time as possible in as little water as is practical." Second -- "Leave the lid off the pan when you cook green vegetables. Cook red and white vegetables in a covered pan and add acid if you need to." And third -- for reasons too numerous to mention -- "DO NOT OVERCOOK ANY VEGETABLE."

